

Witnesses

Your Guide



What is my role as a witness and what do I need to prepare?

A witness in a coroner's court provides evidence to assist the coroner in reaching a decision about how a person died.

Most witnesses who give evidence have already made some sort of written statement which sets out what they know about the death. If you can then it is often a good idea to re-read this before you go to court - to refresh your memory about the events that you are going to be asked about. Bring with you your statements and any documents you may need.

If you are going to be giving evidence about something complicated (such as medical care) then it may be a good idea to have a look at any relevant notes or records ahead of time; so that events are fresh in your mind, and so that you can find any relevant sections easily if you need to answer questions about them.

How long will I have to go to court for?

Before the hearing the coroner will usually give some indication of the order in which they will hear the evidence. Depending on how long the inquest is likely to take, you may be required to attend court for a day, for more than a day, or for just part of a day.

ATTENDANCE

WHEN SHOULD I ARRIVE AT COURT?

Please leave plenty of time to make sure that you arrive at court when you have been told to for the hearing - bearing in mind that traffic is often heavy in and around Bristol.

WILL ANYONE BE THERE TO HELP ME?

The court has the benefit of witness support services (Coroners Court Support Service - they have a website which you may find helpful); either a volunteer or a member of court staff will be available to help you when you arrive. They can tell you where to go and can explain a little more about the inquest process if you have any concerns.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

The dress code is court wear for professionals, for others is "smart casual". Clothes such as shorts are not appropriate. Mobile phones should be switched off.

What will happen during the inquest itself?

Once the inquest is underway you will usually be asked to sit in the courtroom until it is time for you to give evidence. When it is your turn to give evidence, the coroner will ask you to come into the witness box and then you will be asked to give an oath (or to affirm) that you will tell the truth.

The coroner will then ask you questions about the person who has died or about the death itself. If you have made a written statement, then often the coroner will use that to help structure the questions that they ask you.



Any 'interested persons' who are present (for example the deceased person's next of kin) are also entitled to ask you questions as long as they are relevant to the inquest, so when the coroner has finished asking you questions then there may be questions from interested persons. If you are legally represented, they will also have the opportunity to ask your questions.

Once you have answered all of the questions then normally you will be free to leave court if you would like to, although occasionally you may be asked to stay at court to hear the evidence of one or more other witnesses (before being told that you are free to leave later in the day). The coroner will tell you when you can leave.

What is the purpose of the inquest?



At its simplest, the coroner's job is to find out who has died, and when, where and how they died.

The question of 'how' someone died can involve an investigation of things that may have contributed to the death, so if you are aware of anything that happened (or should have happened) that may have contributed to the death, then you should make sure the coroner is aware of it, whether you have been asked about it or not, so that the coroner can decide whether they need to investigate further.

More Information

If you would like more information about any part of the inquest process, then a good place to start is the '[Guide to coroner services for bereaved people](#)' produced by the Ministry of Justice. Our website is also available at avon-coroner.com